

# LOW CARB AND VEGETARIAN

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**Yes, You Can Have It All!**



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# Introduction

Many people want to cut back on their carbs for health reasons. The process of reducing carb intake simply involves the replacement of sugars and starches with vegetables, fish, nuts, fats, eggs, and meat.

Conventional low-carb diets rely heavily on meats to replace starches and sugars that come from the foods rich in carbohydrates.

While this seems straightforward and easy to do, it poses a larger problem for those who don't eat meat, which can make many low-carb diets seem unsuitable for vegetarians and vegans.



However, the truth is with some planning and knowledge even vegetarians and vegans can go low carb, with some modifications.



# Benefits Of Low Carb Eating

## Weight Loss

Research has shown that reducing carb intake is one of the most efficient ways to lose weight and reverse obesity. By eating low-carb, you are going to reduce your appetite and caloric intake naturally because reducing carbs helps regulate blood sugars and the hunger hormone leptin that function as its best when carbs are reduced (Banks WA, Coon AB, Robinson SM, Moinuddin A, Shultz JM, Nakaoke R, Morley JE, et al, Triglycerides induce leptin resistance at the blood-brain barrier).

Your optimal carb intake really depends on your goals, those who are obese or have a lot of weight to lose may find the more strict plans to be most effective. The Ketogenic diet is very strict in carb intake.

Conversely, someone who has a high amount of muscle mass, and does a lot of anaerobic work, such as lifting weights, is going to be able to tolerate a much higher amount of carbs than someone who is sedentary.

The Ketogenic diet lowers carb intake in the range of 20 to 50 grams daily, but preferably 20 grams. This induces ketosis, which is a metabolic process that burns stored body fat instead of dietary carbs of energy. Ketosis is the reason that many have found success in losing weight and keeping it off by simply reducing carb intake and limiting their sources.

Numerous studies have shown low carb diets to be more effective in the actual amount of weight lost and also for lowering risk factors for heart disease, and improving lipid profiles than low fat diets.



Simply put, when you eliminate dietary carbs, which is typically the go to fuel for the body, it has no other option than to become ketotic and to start to use its fat stores for energy.

Therefore, a low carb diet will be very low in carbs, high in healthy fats and includes moderate protein intake.

In addition to being an effortless way to lose weight, sticking to a low-carb diet also has other health benefits, such as improved blood sugars and a decreased risk of heart diseases. Here we are going to look at six ways a low-carb diet is going to benefit your body.

## Better Cognitive Function

Like drugs, sugar is addictive and therefore has a negative impact on the brain, causing erratic cravings for sugar and food in general, fatigue and crashes, and even anxiety.

On the other hand, certain fats are healthy and benefit the brain in improving memory, energy levels, mood, and learning.

A report published in The Journal of Physiology illustrates these points and reports that a diet high in sugar and low in healthy fats like omega-3 fatty acids was associated with insulin resistance as well as lower cognitive scores.



## **Reduced Risks Of Metabolic Syndrome And Heart Disease**

Another 2012 study, published in the American Journal of Epidemiology found low-carb diets to be more efficient at reducing metabolic syndrome and heart disease risk factors versus low-fat diets. The study conducted twenty-three trials with a total of 2,788 participants from several different countries.

## **Lower Risks Of Type 2 Diabetes**

A study published in The Upsala Journal of Medical Science detailed the results of using a low carb diet versus a low fat diet in two groups of obese subjects who were diagnosed with type 2 diabetes.

One group ate a low carb diet, while the other a low fat diet, both of which were of equal daily calories. The low carb group was the only one to show very positive effects in blood glucose levels. A 6-month follow up showed a significant weight loss in the low carb subjects, which remained one year later.

## **May Help Reduce Cancer Risks**

Diets that are high in refined carbohydrates and sugars contribute to the free radical damage in our bodies. This damage feeds cancer cells and potentially helps them to proliferate faster. In a low-carb diet, the levels of glucose are decreased, and since cancer cells feed of glucose, they aren't able to experience the growth they may have following a traditional western diet.

## **Improved Digestive Function**

Sugar promotes the growth of bad gut bacteria and a diet that has a high sugar intake makes you more prone to candida virus, irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) and exacerbates the symptoms of



leaky gut syndrome. The Journal of the American Gastroenterological Association published a study that was able to show that people who suffered from IBS showed significant improvement in their stool habits, stomach pain, and even quality of life in subjects who followed a low-carb plan for just four weeks.

## **Improved Hormone Function**

Researchers from the Discipline of Psychiatry and School of Medicine at the University of Adelaide conducted a study that compared the psychological and hormonal effects of diet on women suffering from hormonal polycystic ovary syndrome.

One subject group was given a low protein, high carb eating plan, while the second subject group ate a high protein, low-carb diet.

After sixteen weeks, those subjects on the high protein and low carb plan were found to have a significant reduction in depression and overall improvement in self-esteem.

Researchers surmised that the low carb plan with high protein intake naturally balanced hormones to decrease depressive symptoms.

# The Ketogenic Diet

The ketogenic diet is a low carb plan that has been in existence for several decades. It is very strict in carb intake, typically 20 grams per day, but at least less than 50.

## Standard Ketogenic Diet (SKD)

The standard keto plan is very low in carbs, with moderate protein, and high in healthy fats.

- *The ratio is typically, 75% fat, 20% protein and 5% carbs*

## High-Protein Ketogenic Diet

The high-protein plan is similar to SKD, but includes more protein.

- *The ratio is typically 60% fat, 35% protein and 5% carbs*

There are also two other plans intended for bodybuilders, athletes and those participating in intensive training, known as the **Cyclical Ketogenic Diet** and the **Targeted Ketogenic Diet**, where carb intake will fluctuate around working out.

The ketogenic diet prescribes that most of the carb intake come from non-starchy vegetables and some dairy.

## The Net Carb Formula

Net carbs are those that affect blood sugars, and are the only ones counted on a low carb diet.

The formula is simple:

Total Carbohydrates – Fiber = Net Carbs

Check labels to be sure that these foods fall in line with your daily carb intake limits.

## Eliminate All Sugars

Another thing to be aware of when you are on a low carb diet is the restriction of all sugars. Both refined sugars and foods that are naturally high in sugar are high in carbohydrates.

This includes table sugar, all sweets, soda, fruit, milk, and any other food that naturally contains sugar or is made with it.

### ELIMINATING SUGAR IS KEY TO INDUCING KETOSIS

Consuming foods that are high in sugar are going to cause you to meet and exceed your daily carb intake very quickly.



## Eliminate Starches

Starches, including starchy vegetables trigger an insulin response in the body, and provide a carb based fuel, both of which are the two most important things a low carb plan aims to avoid.

- This includes grains and even whole grains, which carry a high glycemic load, interfere with ketosis, and impede the fat burning process intended in a low carb plan.
- Grains and whole grains include, rice, breads, pasta, cereal, oatmeal, any fried food, tortillas, barley, amaranth, millet, quinoa, spelt, couscous, bulgur, rye, muesli, crackers, Pizza crust, corn starch, pancakes, waffles, French toast, white flour, whole-wheat flour, rice flour, corn flour, and others.
- Other starches include vegetables such as corn, potatoes and other root vegetables.
- All beans and lentils are also starches and need to be avoided on a strict low carb plan, or greatly limited on moderate carb intake plans.



Ultimately choosing to eat a low-carb diet means that you are replacing the rice, grains, and pasta that you usually consume, with foods that are high in protein and fats instead.

## Cut Out Processed Foods

Processed foods are those that have been altered from their whole or original state. Typically, anything that comes in a box, bag, lives on a shelf or made in a factory is considered processed.

Processed foods often give the illusion of being healthy when in reality, they are not and many processed foods that are labelled as being low carb may not be.

Processed foods also tend to be high in sodium, unhealthy fats, and sugars that are often very well hidden.

Instead, eat real whole food! When you stick to foods that are natural and unprocessed, you are getting all of the nutrients that the food contains, in its most natural form.





# Carb Intake Guidelines For Vegetarians And Vegans

Obviously, the standard keto diet will include a good amount of animal proteins and animal fats, like butter, which can pose problems for those who are strict vegetarians and especially for vegans who eat absolutely no foods derived from animals in anyway. However, vegetarians do have options in eating low carb as do vegans. Here are some guidelines for those who do not eat meat, and even dairy.

## 100 – 150 Grams Per Day – *Ideal For Vegans and Vegetarians*

This is a moderate carbohydrate intake. It is appropriate for those who are active and just want to stay healthy as well as maintain their weight. You aren't likely to lose very much weight while eating this amount of carbs.

## 50 – 100 Grams Per Day - *Ideal For Vegetarians*

This range of carbs per day is ideal for those who want to lose weight while still eating some carbs, more so than the strictest plans.

## 20 – 50 Grams Per Day – *Most Strict To Induce Ketosis and Ideal For Vegetarians*

This range of carbs is ideal for those who are looking to lose weight fast, are metabolically deranged, obese, or have diabetes or want to possibly prevent or postpone the onset of type 2 diabetes like prediabetics. This range is typical in diets like the Ketogenic diet and Atkins™. This range of carbs puts the body into ketosis.

Carbs are replaced with healthy fats and the reduction of carbs triggers a metabolic state known as lipolysis. Lipolysis is a process that occurs when the body begins to use fat for energy, instead of carbohydrates obtained from food. The by-products of lipolysis are ketones and ketosis is the secondary process of lipolysis.

By depriving the body of carbohydrates, which is converted to glucose and typically used as fuel, it is forced to use its fat stores instead, which makes it incredibly efficient at burning fat for energy instead using carbs for the same.

### **Ideal Choices For Vegans**

Vegetarians can easily maintain the lowest carb intake range, but this would be impractical for vegans who are far better off within the 100 - 150 gram range because there simply is not enough vegan plant protein or non-animal fat to satisfy the needs of a very strict low carb plan.



# Eating Low-Carb And Vegetarian At The Same Time

Eating low-carb and vegetarian can be a challenge. The reason it is a bigger challenge is that a typical low carb diet involves eating more meat and animal protein fats for energy, instead of carbs. However, it is not impossible.

There are many vegetarian foods that are high in protein and fats that don't involve any meat products; we are going to look more into these foods in the next couple of sections. The important thing to note is that you are going to be able to use the foods that are listed below as a way to increase the proteins and fats in your diet to be able to maintain a healthy, low-carb diet.

**As you transition into a low-carb diet, remember these three things:**

**1. Fats Are Not The Enemy** – As you reduce the carbs you are consuming, you need to add fat. Choose healthy fats, and don't be afraid of them as they help you feel satisfied and promote the fat burning process.

**2. Be Careful With Processed Foods** – Read the labels of all manufactured or packaged foods. Many of the things you are going to be using to substitute meat in your diet are going to be loaded with starches and sugars. Be conscious of the foods you are eating.

**3. Grains Aren't As Essential As You Think** – When you are going on a low-carb diet, you are going to ditch the grains as they carry a high glycemic load, which is counterproductive to ketosis.



# Good Sources Of Vegetarian And Vegan Protein

In a low carb vegetarian or vegan eating plan, you will need to replace the protein and fats you would otherwise get from meat with non-meat options. What you will choose as these replacements is going to depend on whether you are a lacto-ovo vegetarian or a vegan.

## Lacto-Ovo Vegetarians

A Lacto-Ovo vegetarian is someone who avoids foods that contain any meat, fish, or poultry, but does consume dairy products and eggs. As a Lacto-Ovo vegetarian, there are many products that are high in protein and low in carbs that will fit into your new lifestyle.



**Eggs** – Eggs are also appropriate for *ovo-vegetarian*. Eggs are great because they are high in protein but contain only trace amounts of carbs. Choose pasture raised, free range or omega-3 enriched eggs whenever possible.

**Yogurt, Greek Yogurt, And Kefir** – When you are selecting your yogurts, reach for the ones that are marked full fat, and un-sweetened. Greek varieties are best and those with the most live cultures will increase probiotic intake for digestive health.

**Cheese** – Cheese is highly nutrient dense and can be used in many different recipes. Choose natural, full fat block cheeses.



**Other Dairy** - Heavy cream, full fat sour cream and full fat cottage cheese are all low carb and lacto-ovo-vegetarian.

The foods listed above are also rich in vitamin B12, which is not found in plant foods, but is an important part the diet.

## Pescatarian Vegetarian

This form of "lax" vegetarianism eliminates all pork, poultry, and red meat, but does allow the consumption of fish and seafood and is often referred to as "semi-vegetarian." In this case, there are plenty of fish and seafood choices for your low carb protein.

### Seafood

- Shrimp
- Crawfish
- Crab
- Lobster
- Mussels
- Oysters
- Scallops
- Clams
- Squid

### Fish

- All fish is fine, fatty fish, like salmon, tuna and herring are especially useful in increasing intake of healthy fats.



## Strict Vegetarian And Vegan

### Soy Protein – *Vegan*

If you are a vegan, this means that you do not consume any animal product or by-product. This means that the suggestions above would not be an appropriate part of a vegan diet. For those who are vegan, soy products are a great way to get high protein foods into your diet while keeping it low-carb.

### Tempeh – *Vegan*

Tempeh is a more chunky soy meat alternative that can be marinated, and grilled just like meat and added to a wide variety of recipes.

### Tofu – *Vegan*

Firm tofu is higher in protein and calcium and can be cubed and served in soups, stir-fry, or grilled, and it does a great job of absorbing any flavors. Soft tofu is great in recipes that call for the tofu to be blended. To replace foods like sour cream in dips, silken tofu is a great choice.

### Seitan – *Vegan*

This is a product that is made from wheat, although it has little in common with flour or bread. Seitan is a popular source of protein for vegetarians and vegans as it is high in protein and has a texture that is similar to meat.



### **Soy Nuts – *Vegan***

These nuts are high in protein and isoflavones and can be found in a variety of flavors. The texture and flavor of these nuts are similar to peanuts.

### **Soy Milk – *Vegan***

Soy milk is an excellent source of high quality protein as well as B-vitamins. Soy milk is often made into soy yogurt, which can be found in a variety of flavors and can easily be used as a substitute in recipes that call for sour cream or cream cheese.

### **Whole Soy Beans – *Vegan***

Soybeans are another food that can be used in a variety of ways. They can be cooked and used in sauces, soups, and stews. They can also be soaked and roasted for a crunchy snack. Whole soybeans are high in protein and dietary fiber, but should always be cooked before they are consumed.

### **Avocados – *Vegan***

Avocados have 2.9 grams of protein per one cup sliced. Additionally, avocado is one of the best sources of vegan low carb healthy fats.

## Vegetables – *Vegan*

Many vegetables are low in carbs and in a low carb diet plan most of the carbs come from vegetables.

### Highest Protein Vegetables

- Soybeans
- Edamame
- Asparagus
- Sprouts (especially mung bean sprouts)
- Broccoli
- Spinach
- Brussels sports

Plus you can eat a wide variety of non-starchy vegetable, including, alfalfa sprouts, bok choy, Brussel sprouts, tomatoes, cabbage, celery, collard greens, cucumbers, lettuce, mushrooms, onions, peppers, spinach, squash, turnips, and zucchini, just to name a few.



## Vegan Protein Powder Supplements – *Vegan*

Vegan protein supplements can really fill the gap of animal protein, and are especially useful for athletes, bodybuilders and those building muscle mass. There are many choices in plant-based protein powder supplements including pea protein, soy protein, hemp protein, and even rice protein.

### Chia Seeds – *Vegan*

Most of the carbs that exist in chia seeds are from fiber so they don't count! This means that almost all of the calories that are in chia seeds are from protein and fat.

### Nuts And Seeds – *Vegan*

Almost all nuts and seeds are high in protein and fats and low in carbs. Some of the best ones to include in your diet include almonds, peanuts, pumpkin seeds, sunflower seeds, and walnuts.



### Beans/Legumes – *Vegan*

Legumes are an important part of a vegetarian and vegan diet. While many legumes are high in carbohydrates, green beans and chickpeas are both great options for low carb legumes.

Lentils, black-eyed peas, and kidney beans in moderation are ideal for vegans who cannot eat any of the dairy protein sources.

Beans are not advised for vegetarians on a very strict carb intake plan.

# Sources Of Vegan And Vegetarian Fats

Diets that are low in carbs require there to be a higher number of good fats in the diet. In a traditional low carb diet, some of these fats are obtained from animal sources, however in a vegetarian or vegan diet, the fats need to be obtained from non-meat sources.

## Oils – *Vegan*

When it comes to adding oils into your food, you don't want to just add the first oil that you see. By paying attention to the oil that you are using, you can get a higher amount of healthy oils into your diet.

Some Of The Best Vegan Oils For Healthy Fats Include:

- Olive Oil
- Coconut Oil
- Avocado Oil
- Soybean Oil
- Sesame Oil
- Safflower Oil
- Almond Oil
- Flaxseed Oil
- Soybean Oil
- Algal Oil
- Pumpkin Seed Oil
- Walnut Oil
- Macadamia Nut Oil





## Dairy

Heavy cream, full fat sour cream, plain Greek yogurt, and coconut milk are low in carbs and are ideal fats for vegetarians who eat dairy. Check labels and measure your intake as dairy does have more carbs than vegetables.

## Grass Fed Butter

Butter that comes from grass-fed cows is considered a healthy fat and is great in moderation when you are following a low-carb diet, another ideal fat for lacto-ovo vegetarians.

## Seeds – *Vegan*

Seeds are versatile and can be used in many places in your diet, from salads and breads to simply grabbing a handful for a snack. Some of the best, high fat, seeds to add into your diet include sunflower, chia seeds, flaxseeds, and pumpkin seeds.



## Nuts – *Vegan*

Unlike potato chips, nuts are a healthy and filling snack. Not only are nuts high in protein, but they are also high in monounsaturated fats. The best low carb nuts to add into your diet include almonds, peanuts, and walnuts.

## Fatty Fruits – *Vegan*

Both avocados and olives are low in carbs and high in fat, making them great choices for a low-carb diet.

# Other Low Carb Vegan Food Choices

## Dark Chocolate – *Vegan*

If you are looking for a way to soothe your chocolate craving, dark chocolate is a great option. Choose a dark chocolate with at least 75% cocoa content and without any added sugar, which will be low in carbs, and high in fat and antioxidants.

## Fruits – *Vegan*

Depending on the number of carbs you want to consume in a day, there are some fruits that fit well into a low carb diet. Berries, such as strawberries and blueberries are both great choices.

## Spices And Herbs – *Vegan*

All spices and herbs are low in carbs, including ginger, chili pepper, dill, basil, parsley, oregano, mustard, garlic and many more.

## Condiments and Sauces – *Can Be Vegan*

Lacto-ovo vegetarians can enjoy mayonnaise, and vegans and strict vegetarians can enjoy low carb ketchup, soy sauce, vinegar and other low and no carb sauces, check the labels.

You can eat any food that is low carb and plant based, so check labels and carb counts and remember to subtract the fiber count when determining the impact carb count of any food.

## Caution: Vegetarian Commercial Pre-made Foods

Your supermarket's freezer case is filled with vegetarian convenience foods, like burgers, hot dogs and chicken and the like.

While typically fine for vegetarian and vegan eating, these foods can be loaded with carbs as often grains are used in lieu of meat and so they are not in line with a low carb lifestyle. Check the label to assess net carbs.

# Final Thoughts

Low carb can help you to lose weight, improve your metabolic profile, increase energy, and get healthier.

Although traditionally, low carb meals rely on meat as a way to get fats and protein, these are not the only sources.

As a vegetarian or a vegan, you are just as able to stick to a low carb diet as anyone else is, and as long as you know the right foods to choose you will be able to reap all of the benefits of a low carb diet.

While as a vegan you will not be able to adhere to a very strict plan, you can still greatly reduce carb intake and remember that when you add exercise into the mix, you will lose more weight even when your carb intake is higher than the strictest low carb plan.

Simply ensure that you are eating a variety of foods and are getting ample amounts of protein and healthy fats that your body needs for energy as required in a low carb eating plan, and you will be on your way to a healthier life and a slimmer body before you know it.

